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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

I hate to admit it, but summer is officially over! Don't get me wrong; autumn is a wonderful season, especially here in New England. I just hate to see the summer go. The recent hurricanes are all but a memory except for those in the mid-Atlantic area. They took a miserable beating down there. What a disaster!

Speaking of disasters, I don't recall mentioning that I was finally successful getting online with the PC that I purchased a few months ago. I had thought that the experience (and headaches) I got getting my wife's PC up and running online earlier in the year would have provided me with enough knowledge to get this latest one going. No such luck. I was able to connect to Delphi, but not able to get a connection to its server. I did everything. I practically copied every configuration profile from my wife's machine to mine - still nothing. Friends from Delphi were sending me tips and things to try via e-mail almost daily. Nothing was helping. The last few tips were out of desperation more than anything. One was to reformat the hard drive and reload everything. I didn't like that scenario. The other was to see if there was anything wrong with the internal internet programs - the Dial-Up Networking stuff within Windows. Nothing looked corrupted since the steps in the process were working. And I didn't want to delete stuff I wasn't familiar with. But, it was better than starting all over from scratch! I uninstalled Dial-Up Networking and reinstalled it. No big deal as it turned out, and painless. I went to reinstall. That went well. The moment of truth - try to dial in. Everything went as before - I got "connected" as usual. Tried Internet Explorer, it worked. Tried Outlook Express, it worked. Tried CompuServe, it worked! Success! What a pain! While I had to do some minor tweaking with some of my configuration set-up files, I was finally able to get online and thus not monopolize the machine that I got for my wife's use!

With all of my Atari machines, I ran into an occasional problem where some program wouldn't run properly. On the Atari platform, if something didn't work, you got an error message or "bombs". You knew, usually, where the problem was and able to fix it fairly easily and quickly. With the PC, there's not always an obvious solution, or even knowing where the problem lies. This experience only solidified my resolve to keep using my Falcon and other machines as my primary computer platform! They're reliable, they do most of what I need to do effectively, and I have all of my Atari friends out there to help if I run into a minor problem.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Miranda
jmirando@portone.com

Hid ho friends and neighbors. Well, after the excitement that Hurricane Floyd (Tropical Storm Floyd, by the time it got to my part of the country) brought, this week has been somewhat more low-key. After the mopping up and removal of fallen trees and such, I took a few moments to really look at just how lucky I really am.

Sure, I usually feel abused, unappreciated, and generally put-upon, but I'm in good health, I've got incredibly good friends, and I'm gainfully employed... for the time being, at least.

Yes, I did take the liberty of listing those things in their proper order of importance. You usually don't have complete control over your health or employment, but your friends... your friends really do say a lot about you. I've been lucky in that department even above the other two.

I'm not talking specifically about my computer friends, but they do seem to make up a large percentage of the pool. Sure, we have a lot in common. We're all Atari buffs, we all like taking our machines to their limits, and we all like keeping up with the latest scuttlebutt. But do you want to hear something funny? I've never even met some of them in person. It's this darned feeling of community and common interest that does it, I think.

When all is said and done, I doubt that I'd consider as many people as this to be good friends had I not decided to buy an Atari computer one day while browsing in a local computer store (the owner of which is one of the people that I consider a close friend now).

If you're reading this, it's a pretty safe bet that you're in the same boat as I am where friends are concerned. Take a moment and think about it. If you ARE in the same boat as I am...

Count yourself lucky!

Now let's get on with all the neat news, hints, tips and info available on the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Remi Villatel asks about a Hades computer with an ATI graphics card:

"I know that I saw somewhere on the web (a list of Hades owners) that someone owns an Hades provided with an ATI Rage PRO graphic card. I'd like to get in touch with this person, or any qualified person, to know how it is possible."

Johan Klockars tells Remi:

"It has been mentioned in STComputer that NVDI drivers have been written for that card and I've even seen it advertised. If I recall correctly, the price they asked was about four times the cost of the card itself...

There shouldn't really be much difference between the Rage PRO and the Rage II, however, and you can have fVDI with drivers for the latter for free. Those drivers are currently somewhat Eclipse specific, but it

shouldn't be hard to modify them for use in another machine.

Especially not if the machine has a "PCI BIOS", which I believe the Hades does. (If the Rage PRO cards had been a little cheaper, I'd probably have bought one myself and made the necessary changes to the driver already. I guess I should try finding a used one.)"

Lonny Pursell adds the requisite URL for the site Remi asked about:

"have a look at <http://www.bright.net/~atari/>

click the link "Atari Clone Directory" for list of Hades owners...."

Shiuming Lai tells Remi about how the graphics card was made to work with the Hades:

"Fred Aschwandan of Medusa re-programmed the ATI BIOS so the card starts up in an Atari mode if no driver is installed. To access the colour modes and higher resolutions (up to 1,600 x 1,200 in 24-bit is possible, if your monitor can handle it) on Hades you need to buy this specially-reprogrammed version of the card, and it will be supplied with a custom ATI VDI driver for the Hades. You'll also need NVDI 5; exact instructions on installation are provided with the ATI driver. Contact Medusa Computer for details of local suppliers."

'Steve' asks about TT resolutions:

"I seem to remember from years ago when I owned my ST that there was a utility to increase the standard resolutions. Though I think they were 'virtual screens', but there was a way to interlace ST-High..

Anyway, are there utils to do this on a TT ? I know they're set res modes, unlike the Falcon, but maybe using overscanning/interlacing software?? Does anything exist?

Also, why isn't TT-High available? Surely my multisync can handle 1280x960 in mono?

Can screen refresh rates be changed?

Is there a version of Photochrome for the TT? Or maybe versions of the Falcon's BSS Apex viewers? It'd be great to have a simple ttp application to handle GIFs and JPGs, even if it simply automatically switched to TT low res to display the image...

I've no documentation for Stoop, and it may be donkey's years old, but how can I get this to run on my TT ? (I miss it!)

Does anyone have docs for BIGDOS ? I need to use this in order to use my Zips in TOS mode (they're fine under MagiC). But I really want to read the docs before I 'risk' it!

Can someone email me a 'DESKICON.RSC' file for Gem, thanks."

The inimitable Dr. Clu adds:

"Just to add to the adage "misery loves company" I too am a TT030 user. I'm not sure about the TT high. I know that it required a special monitor, but like you said, you would think that with a software hack and a multisync monitor this would be possible. I know I'm curious

since I have yet to see TT high. Hell, I never got to see a TT in action until I finally went out and bought one.

Jpeg... there are various utilities that came with mine. I hope to find one that works. There is a Jpeg to gif and visa versa... keep in touch and I'll try to let you know what happens.

Beyond that... hey, I'll routing for ya fellow TT user."

Steve Cavender tells the good doctor:

"Yes TT-high requires the Atari 19" display. I think it was called a TTM195 or something like that. I've seen 'em on eBay from time to time.

Very heavy and expensive to ship, some of my sequencing buddies swear by the large Atari display.

I'd love to be able to edit 60 bars at a time in Cubase on that display."

Martin Landa asks about chips for his 1040:

"Hi all of ATARI world! Warning, my english is too BAD. I'm search[ing] for my ATARI 1040 STE the DMA Chip. Type: DMA C398789-001 in PLCC 44pin socket It's for use in the STE, MEGA STE and TT Atari computers."

Nicholas Bales tells Martin:

"Your only hope for specific spare parts like this is Best Electronics in California. Expensive and far away. It would probably be cheaper to cannibalize a cheap second hand STE."

Another of the people I consider a friend, Sheldon Winick, tells Martin:

"I have the DMA chips in stock. By the way, the model number you typed is incorrect -- the correct number of the STe DMA chip is C398739-001. Price is \$20 (US Dollars) plus shipping. Where I you located? I'm in North Carolina (USA). Please respond in Email if interested to s.winick@worldnet.att.net"

Laurence Shields asks for info about an ICD Link II:

"I recently bought a Link II from ICD. The manual seems to be for the "AdSCSI" series but I'm guessing that it applies to the Link as well.

The trouble is, I can't seem to get any of the software to work! I keep getting an alert box that says "Needs ICDBOOT.PRG 6.5.4 or later!"

Well, I have version 6.5.5. How can I get it installed if the software that installs the driver won't work without the driver being installed!!?

The manual is of little help...

I did run it from the floppy but it seems to disappear from memory when I've finished!"

Ken Macdonald tells Laurence:

"Suggestions:

-turn off ext. hard drive/s

- turn on Atari
- wait for desktop
- insert ICD floppy disk
- configure ICDboot.prg in A:\auto folder with Utility program (ICDutil?) to check for all the SCSI id's for your hard drive/s
- save to A:\auto\icdboot.prg
- turn on Hard drive/s
- run ICD boot when hard drive/s 'warmed' up

This should work. You may have to run ICDboot.prg first to configure ICDboot.prg with ICDutil, and reboot."

Louis Holleman tells us:

"I just discovered something nice again: I used to transfer files from my Atari's at home to machines at work (Win-95/FAT16) on floppies sometimes and never had problems with it. Now my own machine is a Win-98/FAT32 system and whatever I write to a floppy, it won't be seen on my Intelbox under Win-98.

When I use Linux (ext2) I get to the files alright. Seems that Win-98/FAT32 is incompatible with other systems?

I experimented with the VFAT settings for MagiC, but even when disabling VFAT on the A-drive it won't work.

Any solutions for this, except for getting back to FAT16 on Windoze, because I won't..."

John Whalley tells Louis:

"AIUI, FAT32 only applies to hard discs. If you could use it on floppies you'd lose space, apparently. I had Grim95 OSR2 with a FAT32 hard drive until recently and floppies still worked. Just changed to Grim98SE (upgrade would be the wrong word, though it seems more stable: but then what wouldn't?), and it seems to read disks OK (just did a quick test, not exhaustive).

My hunch would be that this is nothing to do with FAT32 but lots to do with VFAT. Please make allowances for my rather hazy understanding of the problem in what follows!

I've had trouble with Grim95 (and therefore I guess G98, too - not had it long enough for exhaustive tests!) where it converts your disk to VFAT on the sly (when it accesses it if it isn't write-protected). If you then copy more files to it on a non-VFAT system (eg TOS, MagiC with VFAT off for A:), the new files don't show under Windows as the VFAT entries haven't been made. As it thinks it's now a VFAT disk, it doesn't read the ordinary entries any more, so the files are not there as far as it's concerned.

Apparently running Scandisk on the floppy can fix it (not tried it myself, so no guarantees). I came across the problem while transferring data, so I just reformatted the disk on the Atari (quick format from Magxdesk) and started again.

To cheer you up, this problem affects DOS users too... :-)

I've never enabled VFAT under MagiC on the ST, so can't speak with any authority, but I would have *expected* things to be OK if you wrote the

->From the Editor's Controller - Playin' it like it is!

I got a couple of letters this past week regarding my comments pertaining to the Dreamcast sales numbers and the comparison of "record sales" as determined by money brought in. The comments ranged from why was I picking on the Dreamcast to "everybody does it!" Well, I wasn't picking on the machine, but the marketing and PR people. Yes, I agree, everybody does it. That doesn't make it right, nor do I have to accept it as gospel! I won't get caught up in the discussion for another week. Feel free to e-mail me if you agree or disagree! Let's move on to this week's gaming headlines!

Until next time...

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Hasbro and Delphi Forums Announce Alliance to
Expand Hasbro's Online Communities Following
Success of Initial Forums

Delphi Forums, the Web's leading community creation services company, and Hasbro, Inc. Monday announced an agreement through which Delphi will create online communities for several Hasbro properties, including Monopoly (www.monopoly.com), Scrabble (www.hasbroscrabble.com), and various Hasbro Interactive and Atari games. The alliance follows the success of Hasbro's existing online forums, which have generated 35,000 posted messages and more than 5.5 million messages read since their launch in July of this year.

Delphi currently provides its community platform for three of Hasbro Interactive's most popular CD-ROM games - MicroProse MechWarrior3, Falcon 4.0 and Civilization II: Test of Time. The Falcon 4.0 forum was especially successful and became the most highly trafficked of all of Delphi's 80,000 active forums, breaking the company's growth records with more than 3,400 posted messages in its first three weeks.

"We have been pleased with the great success and popularity of the Delphi Forums for our brands," said Wendy Riches, president of global direct marketing and e-commerce for Hasbro. "This activity indicates an engaged, loyal and satisfied customer base. Based on this success, we are looking forward to offering an online community experience to consumers through other Hasbro properties."

The alliance between Hasbro and Delphi Forums allows each company to focus on its core expertise while sharing the mutual benefits of a more engaged and active consumer base. Hasbro's portfolio of branded entertainment properties provides the basis for engaging content, which will be used to develop online communities as an extension of Hasbro's Web sites. Delphi Forums are co-branded and can be entered from www.falcon4.com, www.mechwarrior3.com, www.civilizationII.com, and Delphi's community

platform directory at www.delphi.com, where more than two million registered participants meet to create and grow their own online communities.

''There are many synergies between Hasbro and Delphi. Hasbro is an expert at creating games and a forward-thinker regarding the value of community to generate customer loyalty and sales. It is clear that game enthusiasts love to interact, and have found the ideal vehicle through Delphi Forums," said Dan Bruns, chairman and CEO of Delphi Forums. ''Delphi is only as successful as our partners are, so we are thrilled that Hasbro has enjoyed such remarkable growth through our forums."

Video Game Show Pits Sega vs. Sony

Thousands came to play, but it was more than just fun and games on Friday for rivals Sega and Sony at the opening of the three-day Tokyo Game Show.

Amid pumping pop music and big-screen displays, the two video-game makers battled it out for the attention of hordes of enthusiasts who flocked to the international expo to get a glimpse of the future in gaming.

At Sega's exhibit, uniformed girls danced in sync atop high platforms to advertise the company's new Dreamcast game system, touted as the first on the market with Internet access.

But the biggest crowds flocked to the Sony booth to check out the yet-to-be released PlayStation2, the upgraded version of the current global bestseller that will hit store shelves in Japan in March.

Aficionados didn't mind waiting in long lines to try their hand at new games like ''Bouncer," a Playstation2 game involving high-speed train crashes, bone-crunching karate chops and highly realistic graphics.

Like Dreamcast, PlayStation2 will also have Internet capabilities as well as stereo-quality sound and spectacular graphics.

Sega was the first to come out with its next-generation video game system, launching Dreamcast in Japan a year ago and in the United States last week.

While sales have been disappointing in Japan, U.S. demand has been unexpectedly strong, which is good news for Sega since it is counting on Dreamcast to bring it back to the top of the U.S. gaming market.

Sega was an industry leader in the early 1990s with its Genesis gaming console, but its next system, Saturn, bombed when it was launched in 1995.

The Tokyo-based Sega now holds about 1 percent of the U.S. video-game market, having been trampled by Sony and Nintendo products with more powerful machines and wider game selections.

''We're not worried about a thing," said Sega spokeswoman Miho Masuda. ''We've captured the hearts of consumers. If we can hang on to them, we'll be fine."

But Dreamcast's success could be short-lived as market-leader Sony prepares to launch its new PlayStation2.

Sony officials were out in full force at the game show pushing the new machine, which will store data on DVD-ROM discs, a step up from the more common CD-ROM disc used for the current generation of PlayStation software.

A key feature of PlayStation2 also is that all games sold for the old system will be compatible with the updated console, so the hundreds of software titles available for the current PlayStation will not become obsolete overnight.

Nintendo will also launch its next-generation gaming system next year.

A total of 75 companies were at the Tokyo Game Show and organizers expect attendance to reach 150,000.

Sega Dreamcast Tops Half Million Units Since Launch

Sega of America Inc. said that sales of its new Dreamcast video gaming console have topped 500,000 units, in just two weeks of sales.

Sega said that it has sold 514,000 units of the new Dreamcast, the first Internet-ready video gaming console with a built in modem, since it was launched on Sept. 9. Sega said these sales figures surpass its own projections of 400,000 in the first month of sales.

These numbers also eclipse the initial sales of the first Sony Playstation when it was launched in 1995, Sega said. Sony Corp.'s Playstation, which reached the half million mark in four months, is now the dominant video gaming console.

''Consumer demand for Sega Dreamcast is continuing at a record pace," said Chris Gilbert, senior vice president of sales for Sega America Inc. ''All of our retailers are reporting huge sales for the system and we are working very closely with them to meet the massive demand we are anticipating for the holiday season."

A successful launch of the Dreamcast in the U.S. is essential to the firm's comeback attempt in the video gaming industry and for its future survival, analysts have said. Sega's launch of the Dreamcast in Japan last year was hampered by lack of software and Sega missed its sales targets.

Sega also said that since the U.S. launch of the Dreamcast, which provides faster and more realistic graphics in a 128-bit system, Dreamcast has captured more than 60 percent of all new video console sales, according to the NPD Group Inc., a market research firm in Port Washington, N.Y.

NPD also reported earlier this week that four of the top five video games for the week ending Sept. 11 were Sega Dreamcast titles, including Sega's Sonic Adventure."

Nintendo Game Boy Color Now Available to 'Try Before You Buy' At Blockbuster

Marking the first time Game Boy has been available for rental at a national retail outlet, Blockbuster Inc., the global leader in the rentable game

category, has announced Wednesday that it will make Nintendo Game Boy Color hardware and software available for rent in participating stores nationwide.

According to Dean Wilson, executive vice president of merchandising, Blockbuster currently retains almost 50 percent of the video game rental market and now is the only national retailer to have Game Boy Color available for rent.

''Game Boy Color is the newest and hottest addition to the world's most popular line of hand-held gaming systems," concluded Wilson. ''Currently, 25 million original Game Boy units have been sold and 3 million Game Boy color units have been sold. We are delighted to be a part of this phenomenon."

Game Boy Color hardware will be available at participating stores at \$9.99 for a five-evening rental. Additionally, Blockbuster will offer 13 different Game Boy games at a reduced rental rate of \$3.99 each also for a five-evening rental at participating stores. Popular titles available at Blockbuster will include Pokemon Pinball, Pokemon Red, Pokemon Blue and Super Mario Bros. Deluxe.

Additional titles will be available for rent in the coming months. Game Boy Color is also able to play any of the 450 original black and white Game Boy titles in color.

''This is an exciting opportunity, not only for Blockbuster, but most importantly for consumers because it allows them to try out this product on a rental basis before deciding to purchase it," said Wilson. ''This introduction has come at a perfect time, particularly for parents, prior to the holiday gift-giving season."

As an added customer service, members who rent the Game Boy Color hardware will be able for a limited time to buy batteries for the equipment at a reduced price of 99 cents, 50 cents off the regular retail price at Blockbuster. For a limited time, Blockbuster Rewards members will get batteries free with a hardware rental.

Omega Boost Hits the Playstation Game Console Full Throttle With Intense 3D Action

Sony Computer Entertainment America today announced the release of Omega Boost, an innovative, full-3D shooter exclusively for the PlayStation game console. The game features incredible graphic intensity and blazing sci-fi action as gamers are thrust into the role of a time traveling intergalactic warrior.

Omega Boost, which was created by Polyphony Digital, the developers of Gran Turismo, provides the intensive gameplay of traditional shooters and combines it with state-of-the-art 3D environments to ensure an action-packed gaming experience. Unparalleled 3D graphics and 360(Degree), free-roaming worlds allow gamers to deliver and encounter a barrage of enemy attacks from every direction.

Players take on the role of Omega Boost, a sophisticated suit of armor as he engages in intense dogfights with multiple enemies and travels through a time warp system to save the very existence of man. Smooth controls combined with powerful audio and visual effects allow gamers to maneuver

and defeat countless enemies in each of the game's stages. Players can choose from first-and third-person viewpoints and blast through 18 different stages of mayhem, each with a boss and sub-boss to defeat and each with various objectives.

"Gamers may not be familiar with the Polyphony name, but casual and hardcore gamers alike know the quality that Polyphony brings to the PlayStation through their racing masterpiece, Gran Turismo," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America. "The talents of this developer shine through in this new 3D action shooter as Omega Boost's intensely intricate graphics and high-octane gameplay draw players into the heat of space battle."

Omega Boost begins in the immediate future where the computers have caused a rebellion against humans on the very same network created by the humans themselves. Players must destroy the enemy forces of AlphaCore, the rebellious molecule on the network, by traveling back in time through a time-warp system to reach the year 1947, when the world's first computer, ENIAC, was born and AlphaCore was born. Each mission is unique and vital to the very existence of man.

Omega Boost was designed by Polyphony Digital, (a satellite company of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.) the very same developer that created the worldwide best-seller, Gran Turismo. The game carries on Sony Computer Entertainment America's tradition of bringing the most technically advanced and innovative videogame software to the market.

Infogrames North America Ships V-Rally Edition 99
- the Latest Installment in the Million
Unit-Selling V-Rally Franchise

15 Officially Licensed Cars Race on 50 Original
Tracks in Rain, Snow, Mud and Fog

Infogrames announced Wednesday that V-Rally Edition 99 begins shipping this week for the Nintendo 64 game console. Gamers can experience the thrills of cross-country racing through all kinds of terrain and weather conditions in official rally cars they can tune themselves.

"V-Rally Edition 99 simulates all aspects of an actual rally race to give the player a complete racing experience," said Steve Allison, director of marketing for sports and racing titles at Infogrames North America.

"Whether you're negotiating a hairpin turn on a snow-covered road in the Alps or groping your way through thick fog, you'll experience all the varied conditions and locales real rally drivers encounter."

V-Rally Edition 99's variety of tracks, locations, terrain and weather conditions along with several officially licensed cars deliver unlimited action:

-- Officially Licensed Cars - 11 official World-Rally Championship cars plus four additional hidden cars, all customizable by tweaking gear ratios, suspension, transmission and control, give gamers the ability to fine tune their racing experiences. Licensed vehicles include Toyota, Ford, Mitsubishi, Subaru, Nissan, Peugeot, Renault, Seat and Skoda.

- Multiple Tracks and Exotic Locations - 50 original tracks in eight worldwide locations, including Indonesia, Corsica, Spain, Sweden and the Alps, keep racers captivated.
- Varied Weather and Terrain- Racers battle pouring rain, fog, desert sun and changing daylight conditions while driving through terrain as varied as tropical rain forests and rice paddies.
- Options - V-Rally Edition 99 gives players a wide range of playing options for maximum enjoyment and longevity: three modes of play - arcade, championship and training mode, 2-player split screen, multiple racing views, three difficulty levels, adjustable engine sound, speed and timing.

Another key feature of V-Rally Edition 99 is its realism. Infogrames consulted with Ari Vatanen, international world champion rally driver, to ensure every aspect of the game would be as authentic as possible. Infogrames also consulted with professional rally course designers to create tracks that were both exciting and realistic. All of the cars are equipped with the latest data from 1999 and are designed to simulate the handling and performance behavior of their real world counterparts. V-Rally Edition 99's Rumble Pak support enhances the driving feel by giving the player all the shocks and bumps of serious rally racing.

V-Rally Edition 99 is available at an estimated street price of \$49.99 from major software specialty stores, computer superstores or direct from Infogrames by calling 800/245-7744. For more information please visit the V-Rally Edition 99 web site at www.vrally.net

THQ's ``Road Rash 64" Rumbles Onto Retail Shelves

The First Nintendo 64 Installment of EA's Popular
``Road Rash" Series Is Now Available

THQ Inc. Wednesday announced the release of ``Road Rash 64" for the Nintendo 64.

Rumbling onto store shelves with a brand-new engine developed by Pacific Coast Power & Light Co., a wholly-owned subsidiary of THQ, this combat racing game burns new tracks in motorcycle mayhem on the Nintendo 64.

Licensed from Electronic Arts, ``Road Rash 64" is available at major retail outlets nationwide at a suggested retail price of \$59.99.

``Road Rash 64' is packed with new game features," said Don Traeger, president of Pacific Coast Power & Light Co. ``In addition to adding new weapons like the pool cue and new multi-player modes and arenas, we revved up the Adrenalin level by squeezing over a dozen bikes onscreen at one time.

``The new graphics engine clusters bikers into close quarters, laying the groundwork for electrifying elbow-to-elbow skirmishes along 300 square kilometers of completely redesigned tracks and terrain."

``Road Rash 64" supports the Rumble Pak and two- to four-player multi-player modes, ensuring gamers long hours of intense pack brawling,

grudges and alliances. In addition, ``Road Rash 64" features a completely new collection of 23 motorcycle models, a total of 25 male and female riders and a wide array of weaponry, for hours upon hours of combat racing mayhem.

Long-time fans of the ``Road Rash" franchise will also enjoy the new weapons, including the lead pipe, the sledgehammer and the new ``spoke jam" attack which sends opponents flying.

``Road Rash 64" also features new race types: Tag, Deathmatch, and Cop Mode, in addition to the classic Thrash and Big Game. All new races support the multi-player modes, pitting two to four friends against each other in the grueling pursuit of victory.

In Deathmatch, a player can complete a lap for a point, or, better yet, crash other players and steal their points. The game even includes an all-new Cop Mode. Players who unlock the hidden and supercharged State Patrol Motorcycle actually get to play the game from the perspective of a cop, busting as many riders as time or track allow.

Electronic Arts Announces the Simultaneous Release
of WCW Mayhem for Both PlayStation and Nintendo 64

Electronic Arts Thursday announced the simultaneous release of its highly-anticipated wrestling title, WCW Mayhem for both the PlayStation and Nintendo 64 game console systems.

Similar to real-life matches, the game offers fast, action-packed professional wrestling both in and out of the ring. The release of WCW Mayhem marks the first product coming out of the high-profile, exclusive long-term partnership for interactive entertainment game titles between Electronic Arts and the World Championship Wrestling Inc., providers of power-packed family sports entertainment.

``We are very excited about players being able to finally get their hands on the game," says Chuck Osieja, producer at Electronic Arts. ``WCW Mayhem truly offers an enjoyable interactive wrestling experience, innovative technological advancements and unique gameplay features that surround fast and furious matches, both in and out of the ring."

Based on the world of the WCW and its well-known roster of professional wrestlers, WCW Mayhem delivers realistic, cutting edge graphics, fast gameplay action, seamless audio presentation and crisp special effects. The game extends beyond the boundaries of the traditional wrestling gaming genre with its unique ability to fight ``out of hand and out of the ring." This feature, unavailable in any other wrestling titles to date, provides the player with the opportunity to wrestle in 13 different backstage areas such as garages, locker rooms and bathrooms - all of which are located away from the main event arenas. Each backstage arena action will be initially seen through a black and white security camera that will quickly switch to an actual in-game camera view. Elevating the game's overall excitement is the availability of 12 unique items (i.e., chairs, traffic sign, steel gate, trash can, baseball bat and even a kitchen sink) in both the main event sets and backstage areas that wrestlers can pick up and strategically use against their opponent(s).

Wrestling fans can brawl in 15 different WCW ring sets including the

popular Monday Nitro, Thursday Thunder, Saturday Night shows, as well as all 12 WCW Pay Per View (PPV) settings. The PPV mode allows the player to experience an intense four match PPV event simply by entering a valid passcode that can be obtained via the official EA product web site (www.wcwmayhem.com) and WCW web site (WCW.com). Players who enter the code prior to each real-life WCW PPV event can engage in wrestling matches that mirror the actual PPV event for that specific month.

More than 50 top WCW wrestlers, some of whom are hidden characters that must be unlocked, are available in WCW Mayhem. Each of the wrestler entrances is complimented with the music used by their real-life counterparts. In addition, the game features a "create a custom wrestler" option that provides a series of unique physical characteristics, factions, outfits and names from which players can select.

Celebrity WCW wrestlers and commentators featured in the game include:

Alex Wright
Arn Anderson(1)
Bam Bam Bigelow(1)
Barry Windham(1)
Bobby Blaze(1)
Bobby Duncum Jr.
"Beautiful" Bobby Eaton(1)
Booker T
Bret "Hitman" Hart
Buff Bagwell
Chavo Guerrero Jr.
Chris "The Crippler" Benoit
Chris Jericho(1)
Curt Hennig
Diamond Dallas Page
Dean Malenko
Disco Inferno
Doug Dellinger(1)
Eddy Guerrero
Eric Bischoff(1)
Ernest "The Cat" Miller
Goldberg
Hollywood Hulk Hogan
Horace Hogan
Jimmy "The Mouth of the South" Hart(1)
Juventud Guerrera
Kanyon
Kaz Hayashi
Kenny Kaos(1)
Kevin "Big Sexy" Nash
Billy Kidman
Konnan
La Parka
Lash LeRoux(1)
Lex Luger
Lizmark Jr.
"Macho Man" Randy Savage
Mean Gene Okerlund(1)
Norman Smiley
Prince Iaukea
Psychosis
Raven
Rey Mysterio Jr.

Our next scheduled net meeting is on October 2nd from 5pm till 9pm central time at the three chat rooms listed below.

This will be the last chance to vote at the meeting for newsletter changes for the fanzine. (the regular two topics stay the same as always: sign up for e-zine only membership and AtariMania scores will be accepted)

Our local meetings will resume on October 3rd, 1999 at the Westchester Public library in Westchester, IL (e-mail me for the address)

Plans for this meeting are:

I'll be showing the fest'99 video
discussing plans for next years meetings
(after this meeting we will only have two dates left
at the library and I decided not to use for next year)

I'll also be playing my Pac-man fever CD on the jaguar.
Following the meeting I'll be having a follow-up net meeting
on the same date.

The local meeting starts approx. at 1:30pm (cst) and ends at 4:30pm (cst)
The follow up net meeting will be at 5pm (cst) till 8pm (cst) (the net
meeting will be at the regular three chat rooms
(irc Efnet Ch#atarivideoclub, On icq (my # is 14051068) and at the AVC web
chat room at the website (link is located on the meetings page of website)

(ICQ #14050168)
AVC online=[Http://www.angelfire.com/ia/AtariVideoClub/AVC.html](http://www.angelfire.com/ia/AtariVideoClub/AVC.html)

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Government Charges Microsoft Knows No Limits

The government summed up its antitrust case against Microsoft Tuesday, quoting company Chairman Bill Gates to support its charge that the software giant knew no limits in maintaining its monopoly power.

"This is a company that is very vigilant in protecting its monopoly power," said government lawyer David Boies in delivering final oral arguments on the facts of the case. "It has no limits."

The Justice Department and 19 states allege that Microsoft Corp. holds a monopoly in the operating system software for personal computers and has illegally used that power to preserve and expand its hold on the industry.

Microsoft maintains it daily faces intense competition and charges the

government's case has been overtaken by changes in the fast-paced software industry.

As it did when the trial opened nearly a year ago, the government contrasted Gates videotaped testimony with his e-mail messages to back its claim that Microsoft considered an illegal deal with rival Internet browser-maker Netscape.

Boies said Microsoft feared that the Web browser made by Netscape, now part of America Online Inc., would become a "platform" on which to run applications like word processors and spreadsheets.

An alternative platform would undermine Microsoft, Boies said, because the company's power depended on the fact that most software ran only in a Windows environment, providing a barrier to entry by competitors.

In a portion of a now-familiar videotaped deposition, shown in court again Tuesday, Gates testified that he was unaware of anything Netscape might be doing in mid-1995.

But Boies pointed to e-mails from that period in the court record in which Gates raised fears that Netscape was a new competitor "born on the Internet" and said there might be a "powerful deal of some kind" that his firm could do with Netscape.

That proposed deal, the government said, was to agree not to compete in some areas. "That is exactly the kind of agreement the antitrust laws prohibit," Boies declared.

Microsoft lead lawyer John Warden said the government's case was in many ways obsolete. "America Online's acquisition of Netscape has rendered ridiculous" the government's claim that Microsoft holds a monopoly, he said.

Warden showed a series of exhibits that included internal AOL documents from the time it was negotiating to acquire Netscape. In one, AOL talked about "extending control over the desktop," which Warden said would put it into competition with Microsoft.

More broadly, Warden said that the "fatal flaw" to the government's approach was its failure to recognize that companies are doing deals all the time that change the high-tech landscape. "In the world of Microsoft, the only constant is change," he said.

District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson is expected to issue his findings of fact in a matter of weeks. There will be more written briefs and arguments before the judge reaches his conclusion of law.

Arguments End in Microsoft Case

After hearing testimony from more than two dozen witnesses and reading tens of thousands of pages of evidence, the judge in the Microsoft Corp. antitrust case is left with starkly different portrayals of the titan of the world's high-tech industry.

The government and Microsoft wrapped up the case Tuesday, as the judge alternately heard the company described as a vigilant monopolist and as a

company that fights tough but legally in the bareknuckles high-tech industry where billions of dollars are at stake.

Citing dozens of internal e-mails and sworn testimony already in evidence, government lawyers said Microsoft was ruthless in trying to protect the dominance of its Windows software. Microsoft's flagship product runs most personal computers and is largely responsible for the vast wealth of the world's richest man, billionaire company chairman Bill Gates.

"There are no other lawful situations in which a company has done what Microsoft has done," Justice Department lawyer David Boies said. He accused the company of having "used its power to squelch potential competitors, to keep them from emerging."

Microsoft lawyer John Warden criticized what he called the government's "astounding failures of proof," together with "red herrings, misstatements and omissions" presented during 76 days of courtroom testimony earlier this year.

Warden charged that the antitrust case, filed under the Sherman Act, was largely driven by complaints from Microsoft's jealous industry rivals, including America Online Inc., the former Netscape Communications Corp., Sun Microsystems Inc., Apple Computer Inc. and IBM.

"The government should not be siding with Microsoft's opponents," Warden said. He said they are "entirely capable of taking care of themselves."

AOL recently bought Netscape for \$10 billion and hired a top Sun executive as its chief technology officer.

Tuesday marked the last time lawyers will meet in the courtroom prior to U.S. District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson's first of a two-phase verdict, which could come as early as next month.

The judge, unusually quiet Tuesday, offered no insight into how he is formulating his decision.

During the trial, Jackson often asked pointed questions of witnesses and lawyers, sometimes even affecting financial markets by the tenor of his voice. But before a packed courtroom gallery Tuesday, he remained inscrutable through five hours of closing arguments.

Stephen Houck, lead lawyer for 19 states suing Microsoft with the Justice Department, told the judge the company's "unshakable stranglehold" over such software "has cost consumers untold millions - probably hundreds of millions of dollars."

"Microsoft is like the emperor without clothes," said Houck, who gave part of the government's tag-team closing arguments. "Everyone knows, including Microsoft, that it's a monopoly."

The lawyers generally focused their closing arguments on what antitrust experts believe to be each side's strongest claims.

The government pointed out the obvious dominance of Windows as evidence that the company wields monopoly power, a crucial legal test for its lawsuit. It also questioned the credibility of Microsoft's trial witnesses, often contradicted by company documents or other industry executives.

Houck told the judge Microsoft suffered from two problems: "the

done-in-by-your-own-exhibit" trouble and ``doggone witness" trouble.

Microsoft challenged the notion that its actions have hurt consumers, and Warden denied that Microsoft ever discouraged the nation's computer makers and other companies from distributing Netscape's Internet software.

Warden also reminded the judge of last spring's decision by a federal appeals court that Microsoft's bundling of its Internet software with Windows was legal and a ``genuine integration" because consumers benefited.

The judge is expected to announce his first verdict - a decision about the facts of the case - within four to eight weeks. The lawsuit is certain to drag through federal appeals courts for years unless the sides settle.

Taiwan Quake May Hike Chip Prices

The Taiwan earthquake means computer-chip makers will lose up to two weeks of production and could lead to an increase in worldwide prices, analysts said Wednesday.

Prices on the chip spot market have been rising recently because of short supply and high demand, and analysts said the disruption in Taiwan could drive them even higher.

The quake knocked out power at most companies in the the Hsinchu Science-based Technology Park. By Wednesday morning, only partial power had been restored to several leading chipmakers there.

The U.S. investment firm Merrill Lynch said in a report that Tuesday's deadly quake would affect output for one to one and a half weeks.

Taiwan is expected to account for 10 percent of global production in value terms this year, the report said.

But some analysts said that predictions were speculative until a fuller damage assessment was available.

For a few days, prices could move higher, said Aston Bridgman, a spokesman for NEC Corp. ``Pricing is about perception. The perception is that there is a problem."

The forecasts were based on the assumption that no major structural damage was done.

Both Taiwan Semiconductors Manufacturing Co., the world's largest dedicated chip foundry, and United Microelectronics Corp. say a full damage assessment is not yet possible.

``Anything at this point is speculation," said Douglas Lee, an electronics analyst at Goldman Sachs in Hong Kong, said Tuesday. ``I don't think it will be catastrophic, but it's hard to determine."

More than 100 companies, including Microsoft, Dell Computer and Lycos, have started an online auction site that challenges eBay Inc.'s dominance of the industry.

By sharing their auction listings, the FairMarketPlace alliance could top 50 million customers per month. Any item put up for bid on one site will appear on all sites, except those selling only their own products.

The online auction industry has soared in recent years, led primarily by San Jose-based eBay, where 6 million users buy and sell everything from Star Wars toys to classic books.

eBay still had the greater volume of goods when FairMarketPlace began Monday. It averages 3.5 million individual items for sale, compared to 70,000 on the combined sites of the FairMarketPlace members.

Jilted Again! Amiga Scraps PC Plan

Users of the Amiga PC -- the computer industry's equivalent of the perennially disappointed Chicago Cubs fans -- have again seen defeat snatched from the jaws of victory.

Amiga, a unit of Gateway Inc., notified its customers via a murky announcement on the Amiga Web site that it is changing its strategy yet again, and will not bring to market a much-anticipated multimedia computer.

The company said it wants to focus on licensing the Amiga operating system software to makers of Internet appliances and other devices. The multimedia computer concept could live on if a hardware partner decided to make the machine abandoned by Amiga.

Amiga's loyal enthusiasts were quick to comment -- posting retorts on newsgroups such as comp.sys.amiga.advocacy and comp.sys.amiga.misc.

"Amiga is like a Zombie," said one poster in response. "Commodore killed it, Escom killed it ... and Gateway killed it. Still, it shambles on."

Amiga's new president, Tom Schmidt, made the announcement in his Executive Update column published on Amiga's site. He thanked Amiga users again for sticking with the platform.

"You have 'hung in there' through a number of upheavals over the past years, and through several false starts on next-generation Amiga platforms. You deserve better," Schmidt said.

Then he hit them with the bad news.

"As you know, we announced in July that we were pursuing the development of a 'multimedia convergence computer' that would serve as the next-generation Amiga desktop computer. After the change in management at Amiga, we reviewed all our product plans.

To be honest, the ability for us to deliver the MCC (multimedia computer) was unrealistic," he said. "We realize that this does not satisfy the desire of the Amiga community for a next-generation Amiga."

Amiga will instead seek partnerships with hardware vendors.

Schmidt's idea, he said, is to collaborate with -- rather than compete against -- PC makers. The move maintains, somewhat, the spirit of former president Jim Collas' plans.

Collas said that Amiga's operating environment and reference specifications for hardware would be offered to a number of OEMs, including Gateway. The multimedia computer to be produced by the company, he said, was to be viewed as a demonstration of the technologies possible with Amiga software, he told ZDNet.

"We are open to the possibility of licensing the MCC (multimedia computer) product specification and design that is now on the shelf to companies that are interested in further developing the Amiga desktop computer product line," Schmidt said.

The idea of running Amiga's operating environment on "Wintel," however, has been generally unpalatable.

Instead, Amiga users are hopeful that a recently formed consortium called the Phoenix Platform Consortium will bring an open-standards-based hardware platform for the Amiga Operating Environment.

Amiga will "Zombie" on, Schmidt told users in his letter.

"The Internet appliance software model that we are putting together will open up an exciting new era of software development that we think will be very interesting to the type of innovative thinkers who were drawn to the Amiga computer in years past," Schmidt said.

Gateway Shelves Plans For New Amiga PC

In another sad twist in the long saga of the Amiga computer, would-be savior Gateway has scrapped plans develop a new Amiga machine.

Instead, the PC maker's Amiga subsidiary will focus on opportunities in the merging information-appliance market as Amiga redefines itself as a software company, president and chief executive Tom Schmidt said in a letter posted today on the company's Web site.

"To be honest, the ability for us to deliver the [multimedia computer] was unrealistic," the letter stated. "Furthermore, I have fundamentally decided that it would be better to partner with a wide variety of hardware partners, rather than compete against them with a product of our own."

Schmidt's letter was posted after CNET News.com reported that sources said plans for an Amiga computer had been dropped.

The economics of making a computer for a small number of loyal Amiga followers apparently did not make sense to Gateway, even though Gateway's Amiga unit said as recently as July it would offer a new computer. But that announcement was followed by the sudden departure of former president Jim Collas, raising doubts among Amiga's fans about the company's direction.

Schmidt said in his letter that the company reevaluated its plans to build an Amiga computer after Collas' departure. Those plans now call for tiny

Amiga to focus on building software for set-top boxes and Internet appliances, including devices based on the Linux operating system.

This is Schmidt's strategy as stated in a letter earlier this week: He wants Amiga software "running on every type of device imaginable, on top of every other operating system out there." That element of Gateway's strategy has not changed since CNET News.com first outlined the plan in July. But dropping plans for building an Amiga PC, at least for now, is a sudden departure for the company.

Lack of a new computer worries long-suffering fans of the Amiga, which has something of a cult-like following. But users are still holding out hope for a new computer that runs the Amiga operating system.

A collection of Amiga fans, including hardware and software engineers, have organized a group called the Phoenix Platform Consortium that is planning on creating reference designs for its own Amiga computer. A company in Germany called Phase 5, which sells products such as processor upgrade cards for Macintosh and Amiga computers, is also working on a desktop machine that is slated for release in early 2000 that would be backward-compatible with older versions of the Amiga operating system.

Schmidt said that Amiga would consider licensing the hardware design Amiga had come up with in order to satisfy current users.

Microsoft Pressed To Disclose Hotmail Review

Microsoft is under pressure to disclose results of a pending security review of its Hotmail subsidiary following the discovery of privacy holes in the free email service.

Consumer advocates such as Jason Catlett, founder of Junkbusters, are calling for full disclosure of the report. Otherwise, Catlett says, Hotmail's 40 million registered users will have no assurance that their accounts are safeguarded.

As first reported by CNET News.com, an outside audit of Hotmail was commissioned after the service was pulled offline last month when it was discovered that accounts could be entered without passwords as long as a user's name was known. Microsoft patched that security hole the day it was found, but the company is investigating another bug that makes it possible to generate false passwords to crack open Hotmail accounts.

After the first security hole was uncovered, Microsoft and the Web privacy seal program Truste announced that the company's email service would undergo a voluntary review by a Big Five accounting firm that will not be named. Both touted the independent review as proof that industry self-regulatory efforts will improve consumers' online privacy.

However, Microsoft now says that it can't reveal the scope of the review or the final report because of guidelines set by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA), which oversees the conduct of major firms.

"The results of the report are restricted to the parties who have mutually agreed to the review procedures, Truste and Microsoft, due to AICPA rules governing the review," Microsoft's chief operating officer, Bob Herbold,

stated in an email provided to News.com.

Microsoft's statement prompted Catlett to send a letter to the company, Truste, and the Federal Trade Commission. "If the audit isn't made public, then Truste should be called 'Trust Me,' because the consumer has no independent confirmation that their personal data stored by Hotmail is safe," Catlett said today. "If they are going to hide the audit report, it defeats the whole purpose."

Specifically, Microsoft has commissioned an "Agreed-Upon Procedures Engagement," in which the parameters of the review are set by the certified public account, the client, and usually a specified third party, in this case Truste. The results of this type of report can only be made available to those parties, according to the AICPA.

"The idea is that this is not a standardized review, and it may not be appropriate for someone else to view because it could be misinterpreted," said Cathy Mathews, director of technical member services for the California Society of Certified Public Accountants, whose members follow AICPA guidelines.

"Under the CPA rules, [Microsoft] has to be careful about what they say publicly about the review because they may make statements that aren't OK with the CPA firm," she added. "The firm won't want to mislead the public about what they have done here."

The online industry and the Clinton administration have endorsed so-called privacy seal programs as a way to safeguard anonymity. But as more Net users provide valuable personal information in exchange for goods and custom Web content, privacy advocates say better laws are needed to shield privacy, because industry guidelines don't come with strong enough enforcement.

That is why Catlett is calling on Truste to take formal action and "compel" Microsoft to make changes to its system, as well as to make a full disclosure of the audit.

"Microsoft must inform Hotmail users accurately of the extent of its vulnerabilities, and stop representing the service as safe," Catlett stated in his letter to the company and Truste.

Microsoft said today that it will make some type of announcement when the security review is completed.

"Truste has requested that we verify that Microsoft's statements about the identification [of the problem with Hotmail], our remedy, and our ongoing quality assurance to prevent further occurrence of this are indeed correct," said Richard Purcell, director of data policies and practices for Microsoft.

"The rules mean the firm can't publish the findings, and we can't publish its report, but it doesn't disallow us from releasing a statement about the findings on our own," he added.

The Truste seal usually applies to the use of personal information collected from surfers, but licensees must also ensure that they will "help protect the security" of the information they store.

When Truste receives complaints, as it did with Hotmail, it pledges to investigate the matter. Depending on the allegation, that could result in

an on-site review by a certified public accounting firm, the revocation of the site's trustmark license, or a complaint to the FTC.

Truste has made other investigations public, including one that focused on a feature in Microsoft's Windows 98 operating system. Still, Truste's guidelines don't state that the details of an audit will be published. And in the case of the Hotmail audit, it was only suggested by Truste--not ordered--so it is not overseeing the review.

"The big difference to keep in mind here is that we never got to the stage where we mandated Microsoft to do the audit. If that had been the case, then we might be in a different situation. We hope it can be made public," Truste spokesman David Steer said.

Microsoft Acquires Visio For \$1.3B In Stock

Microsoft Corp., beefing up its office productivity business, on Wednesday morning announced it would acquire Visio Corp. in a stock swap worth \$1.3 billion.

Visio makes technical drawing and business diagramming software. The Seattle-based company will become the Visio Division of Microsoft's business productivity group, officials said. The 9-year-old company had about \$200 million in revenue last year.

Visio President and CEO Jeremy Jaech will become a vice president and report to Microsoft Senior Vice President Bob Muglia.

Visio co-founder Ted Johnson, currently Visio's chief technology officer, also will become a Microsoft vice president, in charge of future product development for the Visio Division.

The deal calls for Microsoft to exchange 0.45 shares of its stock for each share of Visio stock, giving it a value of around \$1.3 billion. The deal must get the approval of regulators and Visio shareholders.

Microsoft said there would be no immediate changes in Visio's operating procedures, adding that the company would continue working on its Visio 2000 editions.

'One plus one equals three'

Jaech said in a conference call that the acquisition would enable his company to take advantage of Microsoft's development teams and its reach into the global marketplace.

"It's really a one plus one equals three equation for us," Jaech said. "The result is we get a much greater impact on business customers than we could have on our own."

Muglia said Visio's software would enhance Office with new visual abilities attractive to Microsoft's target market of "knowledge workers."

"The idea of being able to communicate visually in addition to words and numbers is very attractive to us," Muglia said.

The deal will add immediately to Microsoft's earnings, Muglia added.

"This is not a dilutive deal," he said. "It's actually accretive to Microsoft earnings because Visio is a very profitable company."

Earthlink, Mindspring To Merge

EarthLink Network Inc. and MindSpring Enterprises Inc., two fast-growing providers of dial-up access to the Internet, are merging in a \$1.4 billion stock swap to create a tough new rival to America Online Inc.

The marriage of close competitors, each founded just 5 years ago, speeds the consolidation of a highly fragmented industry brimming with thousands of small Web access providers.

The entity created by Thursday's transaction would have 3 million subscribers when the deal closes early next year, eclipsing the 2.5 million users of AT&T online services, and the 1.8 million who connect to the Web through Microsoft's MSN service. But it would still be far less than AOL's total of 20 million subscribers, which includes about 2 million accounts at its CompuServe unit.

Nevertheless, EarthLink and MindSpring intend to use their combined market heft to launch a \$300 million advertising campaign next year in a bid to steal business from AOL. The aim is to have a total of 5 million customers by the end of 2000 and 8 million in 2001.

"We're going to be in hot pursuit," said MindSpring president Mike McQuary, who will hold the same title at the new company. "The message (to AOL) is that objects in the rear view mirror are a lot closer than they may appear."

AOL, through a spokesman, declined to comment.

EarthLink and MindSpring are acting on an important industry tenet: Additional subscribers are needed to convince companies to buy advertisements on the start-up Web pages set up by Internet access providers. The revenues gained from access fees alone, typically set at \$19.95 a month, aren't enough to fuel company growth. Fees, moreover, are dropping with a recent flurry of promotional deals by computer companies that offer free Internet access to buyers of PCs.

"If you don't have critical mass within your user base, it's hard to drive up your advertising revenues," said Zia Daniell Wigder, an analyst at the Jupiter Communications research firm. "It's going to be increasingly hard for the tiny players to compete."

Despite their combined weight, EarthLink and MindSpring plan to keep portraying themselves as the hippest Web service around compared with industry behemoths AOL, AT&T and Microsoft.

Both companies distinguish themselves by claiming to provide more reliable service, with fewer busy signals for people trying to log on and fewer instances of kicking off online customers. AOL, by contrast, has succeeded by appealing to newcomers to the Internet, offering a colorful, easy-to-use menu of online choices.

Both relative newcomers to the Internet access business, EarthLink and

MindSpring have quickly made their mark in the shadow of far larger competitors.

EarthLink, a young Pasadena, Calif.-based company, grew from 30,000 subscribers in late 1995 to more than 1.3 million today and is projected to rapidly add subscribers by the deal's close in the first quarter of next year. Sprint Corp., the nation's third largest long-distance telephone company, sold its Internet access service to EarthLink last year in a \$180 million deal and now owns 28 percent of EarthLink. If it doesn't change its investment, it will own about 14 percent in the combined company. EarthLink's alliance and contractual arrangements with Sprint will all remain intact.

Atlanta-based MindSpring, with 1.2 million subscribers, leapfrogged to the top tier of U.S. Internet access providers through a string of acquisitions. While dial-up access comprises 85 percent of its sales, it also hosts Web sites and sells dedicated online access to business customers.

Microsoft: Y2K Email Fix A Hoax

Microsoft today warned customers that a series of email messages offering quick fixes for year 2000 contain virus-infected software that can wreak havoc on personal computers.

Playing on consumer fears about the Year 2000 technology problem, one such message, known as the Y2Kcount.exe, falsely appears to be coming from Support@microsoft.com and has already been maliciously distributed to Microsoft customers through email, the company said.

Unsuspecting consumers who open the email message and execute the attachment may cause their computers to be vulnerable to the virus, Microsoft executives warned. "The Y2K-related email message that claims to come from Microsoft is a hoax. Consumers should not open the attachment but rather delete it immediately," Don Jones, director of Year 2000 Readiness at Microsoft, said in a statement.

As many as eight different versions of the malicious email message are thought to be in circulation.

The Redmond, Washington-based software giant advises those looking to make certain their computers are ready for the Y2K date rollover to use the legitimate tools available at Microsoft's Y2K Web site, or the Microsoft Year 2000 Resource CD.

Microsoft said if it does send email messages to its customers regarding Y2K updates or security patches, it is solely to inform them that they are available and will only provide links to the Microsoft download sites. The company never attaches the software itself to the respective email.

Microsoft Prepares For Web War Over Office

Now that Microsoft Office, one of the most lucrative pieces of software ever assembled, has a Web-based competitor that's absolutely free,

Microsoft is getting ready for another Internet war.

Microsoft's rival Sun Microsystems Inc. bought Star Office last month and plans to boost its development as a Web-based device running over the Net on personal computers and Internet appliances.

The stakes are high. With Office installed on 100 million personal computers, Sun is taking on Microsoft's most important application, accounting for 40 percent of total revenue.

Microsoft downplays the threat of the free software.

"Star Office has been around for years," said Microsoft Office product manager George Meng. "They've been giving it away and we've sold 100 million licenses. I think that speaks for itself."

But Meng said Microsoft is busy on a new Internet-based, or "Web-hosted" Office version, not in response to Star but because customers are looking for it. Meng said there are not big technical obstacles to creating the product, although it may involve partnering with other companies.

"We will have a Web-hosted office," said Steve Ballmer, President of Microsoft has said repeatedly in recent appearances. The new product won't be free like Star, Microsoft insiders say, but the company admits it is examining different pricing models.

For its part, Sun believes it can make serious inroads into Microsoft's Office market. It has already put thousands of copies into users hands via downloads over the Internet, and it's preparing Star Portal, which makes it a fully Web-hosted application.

While the Star office software lacks the features of Office, it's getting passing marks from reviewers, who see it as acceptable for all but "power users." Indeed, one of the key worries and sources of debate in the marketplace is whether it can fully share documents from Microsoft Office, a sign that potential users may be viewing it as an alternative.

"There is an opportunity for someone to displace Microsoft," said Rob Enderle of Giga Information Systems, an industry consultant. "I would argue that it (the threat) is as strong as when IBM went into its decline. Microsoft is dealing with one of the highest levels of customer dissatisfaction of any company that we follow."

Microsoft users have come to view Office upgrades as "a tax," that users need to pay, and "the (perceived) value has gotten disconnected from the revenue."

No one would suggest that Microsoft is playing a shell game. Each of the upgrades has been an awesome technical feat, involving tens of millions of lines of code and putting highly sophisticated automation features on every desktop.

Indeed, it's the sophistication that could be Microsoft's Achilles heel.

"For 99 percent of users, Star will have everything they need," said Andrew Bochman of Aberdeen Group. "The average person is not a power user of all those Microsoft features. It's hard to see how Microsoft can respond to this threat."

Some are skeptical that Sun will be able to ever come close to matching

Microsoft's consumer marketing ability, as well as its skills in packaging software and training users, and in building a huge brand identity worldwide.

Still, the Internet helps all upstarts, including well-heeled ones like Sun, the dominant player in the computer server market, selling most of the machines that house Web pages and serve them to millions of users.

The Internet is growing, as is the use of "hosted" applications, software that runs on the Web. Scores of new companies, called Application Service Providers, are helping build the infrastructure to put many companies on the Internet. As they install companies' Internet systems, some will install Office suites, and some will tout the merits of the free Star system.

A company called Desktop.com this week will release a Web-based desktop and software system that's aimed at taking on Microsoft's operating system. In effect, it "would duplicate the look, feel, and functionality of a Windows-based system -- without the hassle of owning and maintaining software on a desktop," said Christine Nairne, E+Offering analyst, who released a brokerage report forecasting a surge in such applications.

"The idea behind these initiatives remains the same, to make applications more accessible, and more functional, to more users, at a lower cost," said E+Offering analyst Christine Nairne.

A consumer product company's help desk or a ticket ordering system, for example, with hundreds of users who might normally install Office at every workstation might go for a pared-down suite. Star might fit the bill, so Microsoft knows it needs to be there as well.

"There is demand (for a Web-hosted office)," said Weng. "We know it. We hear it from our customers. We were working on this before Sun bought Star," said Weng.

The company will talk more about its Internet strategy at an all-day conference for the press in Redmond Thursday. While Office is not on the agenda, it's expecting to field questions about it. Weng said the company is well-along in its strategic effort to make Office a Web product.

"Microsoft is beginning to react to the emergence of ASPs -- acknowledging that the traditional model is changing," said Nairne. "And they need to be prepared to play in the ASP space."

Senate Predicts No Y2K Disasters

The Senate's Y2K panel, in its final report before the dawning of the new year 100 days from now, predicted today the nation will escape nationwide crises from computer failures but individual Americans can expect some inconveniences.

"This is sort of a fender-bender, we don't see any major wrecks here," Sen. Christopher Dodd of Connecticut, ranking Democrat on the Y2K panel, said at the release of the 228-page report.

Disruptions from computer failures, concurred Sen. Robert Bennett, R-Utah, chairman of the panel, "will not occur across the nation. They will occur

across the street."

The report stressed that while problems will be mostly localized, ''disruptions will occur and in some cases those disruptions will be significant."

It said doctors' offices, school systems, local government functions such as 911 services and small businesses are the most vulnerable to computer breakdowns. Dodd said there was concern that some states are not yet ready to handle Medicaid claims that the nation's poorer citizens depend on.

Overseas, where many countries have lagged behind in fixing computers, the situation ''will certainly be more tumultuous."

John Koskinen, President Clinton's chief Y2K adviser, said he and the Senate committee were ''pretty much in agreement on where the risks are."

The bottom line, he said, is that ''there will be some glitches, and nobody is guaranteeing perfection even in the sectors" where much money and technical know-how has been employed.

The Senate report, the result of nearly 30 hearings by the panel, emphasized that national preparations have gone well - that federal agencies are ready, air traffic control systems are fixed, nationwide power grids will work, banks will have plenty of money and Medicare health claim payments should go out on schedule.

The prospects are less predictable for smaller businesses and public functions that haven't had the money or technical ability to fix their computers, the report said.

''Y2K could affect the lives of individuals, but exactly in what manner is unknown," it said. It said Y2K problems ''will hit sporadically, based on geography, size of organization and level of preparedness, and will cause more inconveniences than tragedies."

It noted that Y2K has been compared to a winter storm, and that people have been told to make similar kinds of preparations.

The problems could come from older computer systems that use only two digits to designate years. They could thus mistake the year 2000, or ''00," as 1900, causing malfunctions or breakdowns.

Specifically, the report concluded:

-A prolonged nationwide power blackout will almost certainly not occur, but local and regional outages ''remain a distinct possibility."

-Large-scale hospitals and pharmaceutical manufacturers have made considerable investments to fix Y2K problems, but concerns remain about the thousands of physicians' offices, nursing homes, inner-city and rural hospitals and some biomedical devices.

-The telecommunications industry has spent billions to ensure smooth service, but lagging Y2K readiness in some small domestic carriers could affect services in rural communities.

-Air traffic control systems should function without trouble, but some of the nation's 670 airports are at risk in areas such as jetway security systems and runway lighting.

-Financial services are ready - ATM machines will work and banks will have money on hand if, as estimated, each American household withdraws an average of \$500.

-The federal government will spend more than \$8 billion to fix its computer networks, but there's wide variation in readiness among the nation's 3,000 counties and 87,000 local jurisdictions. Some 10 states are not prepared to deliver such services as unemployment insurance and other benefits.

-Large companies have dealt well with the Y2K problem and the insurance, investment and banking sectors are in good shape. Less rosy is the picture for the education, healthcare, oil, farming and construction sectors.

-Internationally, the Y2K picture is disturbing in Russia, China, Italy and several oil-producing countries. Some important trading partners are months behind in addressing the problem and the economic repercussions could result in requests for humanitarian aid.

The Pentagon, which says it expects little disruption from Y2K glitches, released a planning memo today saying that, in the worst possible case where widespread computer failures abroad affected U.S. military installations, the military will be vulnerable to possible deliberate attacks on its computer systems.

The memo also said Defense Secretary William Cohen intends to issue a "Y2K posture statement," or an overall assessment of the military's readiness to deal with Y2K-related problems, in October.

Compaq Has Smallest Windows CE Handheld

Compaq Computer is hoping that it has finally found a cure for a bad case of Palm envy.

Compaq on Monday will unveil the Aero 1530 in an attempt to draw business from rival Palm Computing's ultra-sleek Palm V. It is the smallest handheld device running on Windows CE software, the lighter sibling to Microsoft's desktop PC operating systems.

But any time that Compaq gets in the limelight will be limited. Palm plans to launch the successor to the Palm V, the Vx, on October 4. And newcomer Handspring is poised to shake up the industry when it starts shipping its first products this year.

Sales of Windows CE devices have trailed far behind Palm handhelds, which claimed the top four retail sales spots in July, according to research from PC Data.

The Aero 1530 is similar to the Palm V in size, but weighs 5 ounces--1 ounce heavier than its Palm rival. Both handhelds fit comfortably in a shirt pocket.

Relative bulk has been an obstacle for Windows CE handhelds, which are typically larger than their Palm counterparts, analysts and retailers say. The Compaq Aero 2130, a Windows CE handheld with color screen, is about twice as thick and as heavy as the Palm V.

A sales representative at a CompUSA outside Washington said today that many customers got with the Palm V because of its size. Yet Compaq is betting that customers who are looking for a product that is just as easy to carry but can support more technologies will purchase the Windows CE-based Aero 1530.

"We had the product on our road map for sometime but decided to wait until there was demand from our customer base," said Benjamin Williams, Compaq's North America director of displays and peripherals product marketing. "We don't see anyone coming out with a smaller WinCE unit, and that baffles us."

The Aero comes with 16MB of memory vs. the Palm V's 2MB, a 14-hour replaceable battery, and software that supports MP3 digital audio. The \$299 handheld also has a Type I PC Card slot, another feature the Palm V lacks.

Handspring's upcoming Visor handheld comes with an expansion slot called the Springboard. The slot allows the addition of MP3 players, modems, pagers, digital cameras, and other features to the handheld device.

Despite improvements to the new Aero, Compaq may still have a hard time winning customers because of Windows CE.

"3Com's perspective has always been: Do people need all the functionality of Windows CE if the applications geared toward the pared-down operating system gives them all they need?" said Mark Bates, analyst with PC Data. "If they're right, then what's the advantage of a Windows CE device?"

Palm V topped the retail handheld market in July, selling for an average sales price of \$415, according to the PC Data. The Palm III with 2MB of memory followed at \$211, just ahead of the Palm with 4MB of memory at \$348. The older Palm Pro, at \$105, and the \$98 Casio PV-200, rounded out the top five handheld devices.

Windows CE sales are slow overall, according to PC Data. For the year so far, sales of the Palm III led those of Palm V, which hasn't been on the market as long. Not one Windows CE device, however, found its way into the top five of the PC Data best-seller list.

Williams isn't dismayed by the slow start of Windows CE. "We see this as an emerging category for Compaq, just as the PC was an emerging category in the early '80s," he said. "We think it will be in 2000 when WinCE devices will take off and Palm begins to face some trouble."

But analysts are skeptical about Windows CE's chances of breaking Palm's lock on the market. Last year, Palm OS appeared on 41 percent of handhelds, while Windows CE claimed 25 percent, according to International Data Corporation.

"With Palm going public and Handspring coming in, it's going to be hard for some of WinCE players to gain share in the market," said Lindy Lesperance, an analyst with Technology Business Research.

But Compaq is committed to Windows CE and will introduce a new color handheld, the Aero 2180, on Monday. The Aero 2180, available for \$449, offers up 24MB of memory and a new suite of utilities from Compaq.

In conjunction with the launch, Compaq is retiring the Aero 2110 and reducing its price to \$369 from \$399. The Aero 2130, the retail version of the 2150, will drop to \$424 from \$499. Compaq will also sweeten the deal

with an additional \$75 rebate. The 2150, aimed at corporate users, will drop to \$399 from \$499.

The Aero will initially be available with a silver carrying case, but Compaq is planning to soon offer other colors as part of commercial or retail promotions. Handspring is selling some handheld models in five different colors, following the successful path set by Apple Computer when it introduced the colorful iMac desktop.

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